

THE BRITISH MARSH-TIT.

By LEONHARD STEJNEGER.

Parus palustris dresseri, subsp. nov.

DIAGN.—Similar to typical *Parus palustris*, but much darker; the brown of the back more olive, and the rump clearer and lighter buffish brown; flanks much browner; tail shorter, the longest rectrices averaging 49^{mm}; outer pair of rectrices shorter than the rest which are nearly of equal length.

HABITAT.—Great Britain.

TYPE.—U. S. National Museum, No. 96550.

It is curious that none of the British Ornithologists have had the courage to describe this bird under a distinctive name, not even those who recognize *Parus britannicus* as a distinct species, since there is no lack of evidence in the literature that they have been aware of the difference of the British Marsh-Tit from the Skandinavian and Central European bird, for which Linnaeus's name, *P. palustris*, is properly retained, and most of the modern authors, when speaking of *P. palustris* generally, or when describing it, have been obliged to qualify their reference to its occurrence in Great Britain by remarking, that examples from this island are very much darker than *P. palustris vera*.

Thus, for instance, Messrs. Dresser and Sharpe (B. of Eur., III, p. 100 *seqv.*) make several remarks to the same effect: "*Male from England. Very much darker than continental specimens, the back especially; the rump much paler than the rest of the back, and inclining to rosy white; cheeks and center of the body underneath dingy white; the flanks dark buff, this color also extending on to the abdomen*" (p. 100). "But in a comparison of specimens care must be taken to have the true Scandinavian species, and not the somber English subspecies" (p. 105). "Compared with the true *P. palustris* of Sweden, our English Marsh-Titmice is a very much darker bird, and has the head slightly browner and less glossy. As, however, there are many continental specimens which, *in their winter dress, approach* British examples, we feel that it would not be advisable to bestow a *specific* name on our *insular form*, as the distinctions are not *so clearly* characterized as in the Coal Titmice. That our island bird, however, is *constantly* darker is apparent on comparison of a series of specimens from Great Britain and the Continent. Mr. R. G. Wardlaw Ramsay has kindly lent us some Scotch specimens which exactly agree with English birds" (p. 109) (*italics mine*). Professor Newton's remark (Yarrell, Brit. Birds, 4 ed., I, p. 497) is much to the same effect, and so are those of Mr. Seebohm (Brit. B. Eggs, I, pp. 476-477). The latter gentleman thinks that the amount of brown is not sufficiently great to warrant the separation of the British bird from the Continental one, notwithstanding the fact that he himself has described as "variety" *P.*

japonicus and recognized as deserving of a separate (though varietal name "forms" like *P. brevirostris* and *P. baicalensis*.

From the series which I have before me I see no difference between the present case and that of *P. britannicus*, neither in the quality nor in the quantity of the additional coloring matter in the British forms. The Coal-Tit is considerably more bluish in the gray, and consequently the suffusion of buff in *P. britannicus* causes the back to look more olive. Intermediate forms occur in both. Very well! Therefore we give them trinominals, calling one *P. ater britannicus*, the other *P. palustris dresseri*. I am quite unable to appreciate the consistency or logic of recognizing the former and rejecting the latter.

In addition to the difference in color, it appears to me, that *P. dresseri* has a shorter tail than true *P. palustris*, as I have found the longest tail-feathers in the former averaging 49^{mm}, against 53^{mm} in the latter, while the other dimensions seem to be nearly the same.*

* In default of a better place I wish to correct here a quotation in the synonymy of *P. borealis* as given by Sharpe and Dresser (B. of Eur., III, p. 167), and by Gadow (Cat. B. Brit. Mus., VIII, p. 51.) These gentlemen regard "*Parus fruticeti* Wallengr., Naumannia, 1854, p. 141," as a synonym of *P. borealis*, while in reality Wallengreen proposed the new name for "*P. palustris* Auctorum," regarding, as he did, *P. borealis* SELYS as a synonym of *P. palustris* LIN. We hold that Linnæus's diagnosis is equally applicable to both forms, and that the name, therefore, is to be applied to that one, to which it was first restricted by Selys Longchamps. *P. fruticeti* WALLENGR., therefore, is a synonym of what we consider *P. palustris vera*.

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